

BALTIMORE & OHIO RAILROAD  
STATION, LAUREL  
101 Lafayette Avenue  
Laurel  
Prince George's County  
Maryland

HABS NO. MD-973

HABS  
MD  
17-LAUR,  
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS AND  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### BALTIMORE & OHIO RAILROAD STATION, LAUREL

HABS NO. MD-973

Location: 101 Lafayette Avenue, Laurel, Prince George's County, Maryland

Present Owner: CSX Corporation, 100 North Charles Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Present Use: Railroad station for commuter line service for the Chessie system

Significance: The Laurel B&O Station is significant as the only surviving railroad station in Prince George's County, and an example of decorative Victorian-era railroad architecture. It was designed by Baltimore architect Francis E. Baldwin who was responsible for most of the B&O's Maryland stations and two of its office buildings in Baltimore.

The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, one of the oldest in the nation, opened its Washington branch in 1835. The first and most important of three railways through Prince George's County, it entered Prince George's here in Laurel and continued in a southwesterly direction, carrying both freight and passengers, to Beltsville, College Park, Riverdale, Hyattsville and on to the District. The presence of the B&O in Laurel, as shown by this station, greatly affected its growth and prominence as a highly populated area of commerce, the industrial center of this agricultural county. The Laurel station is now the last of the old Washington Branch stations.

#### PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

##### A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The Laurel station was constructed in 1884.
2. Architect: It was designed by Baltimore architect Francis E. Baldwin, who designed numerous other railroad stations for the B&O in Maryland (including the Hyattsville station, since demolished).

3. Original and subsequent owners: Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company, now CSX Corporation.

B. Historical Context:

The Baltimore & Ohio was the first railroad line constructed in this country for both freight and passenger service on a comprehensive scale. Construction began in 1828 and by 1830 the first 15-mile section, running from Baltimore to Ellicott's Mills (Ellicott City), Maryland, was complete. The Washington Branch of the B&O, completed in 1835, came from the Baltimore line through Prince George's County and into Washington. It entered Prince George's in Laurel and continued in a southwesterly direction, carrying passengers and freight on to Beltsville, College Park, Riverdale and Hyattsville.

The Laurel station was designed by Baltimore architect E. Francis Baldwin. John W. Garrett, then president of the B&O Railroad, hired Baldwin in the mid-1870s to design a number of stations as well as the B&O's new headquarters building. He designed at least thirty railroad stations along the B&O, probably beginning with the Point of Rocks station in 1875. His designs reflected the picturesque Queen Anne style, popular during this period. Despite similar floor plans and basic functions, no two designs were exactly alike. Both the Laurel and the Hyattsville stations were erected from Baldwin designs in 1884. Baldwin also is known to have designed stations at Branchville, Riverdale and Beltsville. The Laurel station, however, is the only Washington Branch station extant (Harwood).

The development of Laurel began in the early 19th century with Nicholas Snowden's grist Mill (converted to a cotton mill in the 1820s). It grew to become the principal industry in Laurel, along with other mills, iron foundries and various small industries and business. The presence of the B&O greatly affected the growth of Laurel, providing the transport necessary to industrial development. Laurel's location along the Patuxent River (which powered the mills), midway between the cities of Baltimore and Washington and the freight and passenger service of the B&O, ensured its success. For decades Laurel was the largest town in the county. Laurel's economy was based on industry, rather than tobacco production and distribution, which formed the economic base of the rest of the county.

Two other rail lines were later developed in Prince George's County, although the B&O remained the principal line, carrying both freight and passengers. The second railway in Prince George's County was the Baltimore & Potomac. Built by the Pennsylvania Railroad in the 1870s as a way of extending a route into Washington, it provided a rail connection between Baltimore and southern Maryland, passing through Upper Marlboro on its way to the Potomac River in Charles County. It also included a branch line into Washington. The B&P was used more for freight than passenger service. The third rail line built in Prince George's was the Chesapeake Beach Railway which ran from the district line at Seat Pleasant to the Chesapeake Bay, via Upper Marlboro. Railroad entrepreneur Otto Mears built it in the 1890s to transport persons from the District to his resort at Chesapeake Beach. It also included a rail link from Upper Marlboro into Washington. The line was abandoned in 1935.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Laurel B&O station is a good, extant example of a small-town, Victorian-era railroad station. Its Queen Anne styling reflects the popular architectural trends of the period, not only of architecture in general but of railroad stations in particular. The station displays the ornate detailing which typifies this building form (as well as other Maryland railroad stations also designed by Baldwin), such as the ornamental brickwork, irregular hipped-with-cross-gable roof, half timbering in the gable ends, roof cresting, and decorative porch brackets with lattice.

2. Condition of fabric: The station appears to be in fairly good condition, retaining its exterior detail (and some interior).

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The main block forms a T-shape. It is a high one-story rectangular block with a hip-on-gable roof, with cross-gabled pavilions to the front and rear (where it meets the side wing). To the side is lower one-story wing, also rectangular, with a gable-on-hip roof.

2. Foundations: The foundation is of rough-cut rubble stone with raised mortar.

3. Walls: The walls are of brick in a running bond pattern and with a smooth finish and fine mortar joints. The walls are ornamented with decorative molded brick in a number of places. The water table consists of a row of molded, beaded brick between rows of stretchers. The opposite occurs in a belt course above, where a row of stretchers is sandwiched between two rows of molded, beaded brick. In the front pavilion, dentiled, corbeled brick below the cornice. Corbeled brick is also used to support the oversized porch roof brackets.

4. Structural system, framing: The structure is supported by load-bearing masonry walls.

5. Porches: The porches take the form of broad overhanging hoods supported by oversized brackets. These run across the east (track) front of the station, to either side of the central pavilion. The porch roof has exposed rafters and is supported, along a ridge board, by oversized truss-like brackets which are in turn supported at the base by brick corbelling. Above the brackets to either end is heavy lattice-work. A section of porch/hood is also found at the north end.

6. Chimneys: There is a single, plain brick chimney (new) along the roof ridge of the south section.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The doorways have a simple ovolo molding surround with a crown molding architrave between the door and the single-light transom above. They have segmental-arched brick window heads with narrow molded beaded-brick above each one. The door into the waiting room is a four-panel door. The doors into the back offices have five (horizontal) panels.

b. Windows: The most elaborate windows appear at the north and south side elevations. They consist of a tripartite window set in a shallow recess in the brick wall and have a segmental-arched windowhead with molded brick with a bead over each brick (like doorways). Each window is the same size and is a narrow, one-over-two-light sash (horizontal muntin) and has a stone lintel and sill. Between the lintel and segmental arch is brick fill. There are double windows at the pavilion sections, east

and west. They have stone sills and a brick segmental arch with molded, beaded bricks. The other windows are one-over-two-light sash (vertical muntin) with a stone sill and segmental-arched brick with molded, beaded brick.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The main block has an irregular roof consisting of a large, hip-on-gable with cross gables at both pavilions and at the north side elevation. There are a number of decorative features including cresting along the ridge of the main roof and the cross gables. At the gable end of the hip-on-gable roof are fishscale wooden shingles, and in the cross gables of the pavilion is half-timbering. At the side gable is a louvered vent. The roof of the south section is a low, gable-on-hip with broad overhanging eaves to the front and rear (east and west) to form the roof of the hood-like porch. There is cresting along the roof ridge and a louvered semi-circular vent in the gable end. Both roofs are covered with asphalt shingles.

b. Cornice, eaves: In the main block, an architrave frames in the shingled area of the hip-on-gable roof, in the gable end, and in the half-timbered area of the pavilion. The same molding appears at the north side elevation. There is a broad, hood-like overhanging porch roof below the gable end, with exposed rafters. The side section has the same broad overhanging roof with exposed rafters to the front and rear (east and west), and a slight overhang in the south end.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: To the center, the area formed by the pavilions to the southeast and northwest is the ticket office. To the northeast side is the waiting room. In the waiting room, there is a ticket window at the southwest wall, benches to the center and along the walls, and a doorway into a bathroom at the northwest wall. The room to the other side of the ticket office was once a waiting room as well (presumably one for ladies and one for gentlemen). It is now used as a lunchroom for the staff. There is another room northwest of that, probably storage for baggage and freight.

2. Flooring: The floors are currently covered with linoleum tile.

3. Wall and ceiling finish: There is molded chair rail with vertical-board wainscoting below.

4. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The doorway into the bathroom and the exterior doorway have symmetrically molded trim with bull's-eye corner blocks. There is a transom above both these doors, particularly large over the bathroom door. The doorway into the ticket office from the waiting room has a plain wooden surround.

b. Windows: The windows, like the doorways, have symmetrically molded trim with bull's-eye corner blocks.

5. Decorative features and trim: The ticket window at the southwest wall of the waiting room is a one-over-one-light sash window with a plain surround and a bracketed shelf. In the light above is the word "TICKETS" in gold with a black silhouette. In the bottom is a metal screen.

6. Mechanical systems: In the ticket office is a timed warning bell which alerts the passengers a few minutes prior to the arrival of the train. This way, passengers can wait in the station in bad weather. This is especially important if the passenger must cross the track to the waiting platform on the other side, depending on the direction of the train. There is one bell for trains heading in each direction, east and west.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The railroad station is located at the southeast end of Main Street in downtown Laurel. It is just outside the commercial downtown in a slightly more industrial area. The station faces east-southeast onto the railroad track. It sits at a high point with a one-lane underpass to the north side.

2. Historical landscape design: Although this is not the original station building, it is the same location along the edge of town. The Hopkins Atlas of 1878 shows the B&O R.R. Co. Laurel Station on the opposite side of the tracks as the current station, with a freight house shown in the location of the current (1884) station.

3. Outbuildings: There is a small shed-roofed shelter or waiting platform on the other side of the tracks from the station. It is a simple, unornamented frame structure, completely open to the tracks, with a wooden deck in front of it.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

A. Bibliography:

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Prepared by: Catherine C. Lavoie  
Historian  
April 1990



PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Station at Laurel was undertaken as part of a cooperative project between the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and the Maryland National Capital Park & Planning Commission on behalf of the Prince George's County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to document select sites throughout the county. A memorandum of Agreement was signed in August of 1988 and the project, to span one year, began in January of 1989. Gail Rothrock, director and Susan G. Pearl, research historian, (HPC) made the selection of sites. They also provided access to their historical research and information on file with the HPC, as well as their extensive knowledge of Prince George's County history. The large format photography was undertaken by HABS photographer Jack E. Boucher. The historical report was prepared by Catherine C. Lavoie, HABS historian, who also accompanied the photographer into the field for on-site investigations.